

WRITING INDIGENOUS FEMININITY: MARY ROWLANDSON'S NARRATIVE OF CAPTIVITY

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Mary Rowlandson's *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682) offers an account of an Englishwoman held captive by the Algonquians in New England in 1675. The popular narrative was printed four times in its first year (three times in New England, once in London) and then widely accorded the status of classic after its 1720 edition was printed. Both Increase Mather's preface¹ and Rowlandson's account itself are ideologically and politically complicated and at times contradictory, but they align informatively as they raise questions about understandings of femininity and race in early colonial America. Rowlandson occasionally describes the women she encounters in terms that she associates with the stereotype of the savage, but for most of the narrative she describes the indigenous women not as an incomprehensible Other, but as a fairly minor variation on normative English femininity. Rowlandson's passionate efforts to maintain her Eurocentric Puritan self-identity do not permit her to understand (at least in any public way) the distinct cultural demands and separate hierarchies that determine femininity in the culture with which she is forced to engage. Although seventeenth-century discourses of cultural difference did not include the racial determinism prevalent in the ideas of difference after the mid-eighteenth century, Rowlandson's work ultimately attempts to articulate indigenous femininity solely as a failure to meet the English standard. This effort both enables Rowlandson to maintain her understanding of herself as superior to

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any woman of difference and confirms for Mather and his audience Puritan valuations of purity and the naturalness of Puritan cultural dominance in the New World.

The wife of Puritan preacher Joseph Rowlandson, Mary White Rowlandson was taken captive in February 1675 in an attack on Lancaster, Massachusetts, during King Philip's War, a conflict between colonists and several Algonquian tribes. The tribes were led by Metacom (known to colonists as King Philip), sachem of the Wampanoags, and Weetamoo, squaw-sachem of the Pocasset (a title equated to Queen by most colonists, as sachem was to King). Rowlandson's account is divided into twenty "removes," which organize the narrative by the different stages of nearly twelve weeks of travel in extremely difficult winter conditions. The entire text is no more than fifty pages long in most editions, but it remains significant for more than the usually cited reasons of its powerful reflection of the spiritual state of a highly devout early Puritan woman, its inspirational model of faith and fortitude, and its place as the first full-length publication by an American woman. It is also one of a very few early colonial texts to depict an unconverted North American Indian woman in individual detail: amid her extensive spiritual meditations and her depiction of captivity, Rowlandson describes her role as slave to Weetamoo, known to Mather if not to Rowlandson herself as one of the most powerful North American Indian woman of the colonial era. Rowlandson's occasional depictions of this relationship establish one of the earliest sites of textual contention for the true role of women in colonial America.

Weetamoo was the squaw-sachem or warrior-leader of the Pocasset by birthright. Her power and her authority in the larger Wampanoag and Narragansett communities came from the status of that birthright, her experience as a ruler, and her familial alliances. During King Philip's War, Weetamoo was married to Quinnapin, the sachem of the Narragansetts, and her sister was married to Metacom, the Wampanoag sachem. These marriages solidified alliances and united the power of three tribes into a single extended family. Weetamoo gained further status among the Wampanoags by virtue of her having been the Wampanoag queen as the wife of the sachem Wamsutta (known to colonists as Alexander). At Wamsutta's death, the title of Wampanoag sachem moved to his brother Metacom, but Weetamoo seems to have retained the respect and confidence of the Wampanoag people, thus rendering her influence even greater than what she already had by her Pocasset title and her status as Narragansett Queen by marriage during the time of Rowlandson's captivity.² She was the only one of the three Indian leaders of King Philip's War to hold such an identifiable position of status in all of the tribes in the alliance.

In his communications with London, Increase Mather himself regularly described Weetamoo as a military threat, and his 1676 *Brief History of the War with the Indians in New England* depicts her as an enemy leader of equal stature with Metacom. The *History* concludes its description of Weetamoo's accidental drowning, her subsequent beheading, and the display of her head on a pole with a Puritan moral: "Now here it is to be observed, that God himself by his own hand, brought this enemy to destruction. For in that place, where the last years, she furnished *Philip* with Canoes for his men, she her self could not meet with a Canoo . . . so that she was drowned."³

Despite the historical importance of the woman Rowlandson describes as her mistress, little has been written on this aspect of the account. Rowlandson's text has long been studied most widely as Puritan autobiography, a testimonial of one woman's faith and its rewards. Current scholarship often engages the question of the cultural function of Rowlandson's narrative. In his major work on the relationship between faith and mourning in Rowlandson's account, for example, Mitchell Breitwieser reads the text as fundamentally conservative in embodying the values of Puritan colonial culture, as do Theresa Toulouse and others. Steven Neuwirth and Tara Fitzpatrick provide contrary examples as they read against the prescriptive grain for evidence of Rowlandson's rebellion against Mather's attempts at ideological control over both text and culture. Ralph Bauer and Rebecca Blevins Faery have begun to examine implications for Rowlandson's text in the larger colonial context. With occasional brief exceptions, however, nearly all of the existing discussions of Rowlandson's text focus on the white woman's experience of captivity.⁴ Mentioned only rarely are the Native American women whom Rowlandson served, and rarer still is the acknowledgment of Weetamoo's enormous importance to the racial hostilities of King Philip's War. This essay will examine the ways in which Rowlandson establishes her identity as a woman in captivity and then consider the implications of her efforts to limit her depictions of the powerful Weetamoo to moments that can be mediated by Rowlandson's naturalization of prescriptive Puritan femininity. Rowlandson writes gender not as a shared identity, but as a basis of difference and hierarchy even among those of the same sex.

Before we can begin to address the implications of Rowlandson's depiction of difference, however, we must first come to terms with the question of "race" as a cultural understanding in the late seventeenth century. The term "race," as we know it, did not exist before approximately 1749, when French scientist Georges Le Clerc, Comte de Buffon, used it to describe what already existed as notations of cultural difference in studies such as that of Swedish naturalist Carl von Linné. Linné removed the quality of reason from the definition of the human species and divided the species "Homo" into *Europaeus*, *Americanus*, *Asiaticus*, and *Africanus* (just as all other species might be divided).⁵ As Nicholas Hudson and Roxann Wheeler have documented, it was not until the 1770s that "complexion emerged as the most powerful testament to the new value accorded to visible racialized differences." Before this decade, most Europeans "believed that variations in appearance and behavior arose from the strong effect of climate, diet, and other external factors," thus allowing North American Indians to be widely perceived as "primitive Europeans, untainted by civilization's corruption."⁶ The skin color of these Indians, for example, was not necessarily recognized as a physiological difference, but was often articulated as a cultural one: Thomas Morton's 1637 *New English Canaan* explains that at birth, indigenous infants "are of a complexion white as our nation, but their mothers in their infancy make a bath of Walnut leaves, huskes of Walnuts, and such things as will staine their skinne for ever, wherein they dip and washe them to make them tawny."⁷ In fact, as Wheeler documents, "Christianity, as well as complexion, distinguished Britons from slaves [of all origins] in the colonies; for example, the Virginia Slave Code defined slavery in terms of religious difference as late as 1753."⁸ For much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, then, the European sense of superiority over

America's indigenous peoples was based not on the physiologically racialized qualities that would become a dominant concern in nineteenth-century discourse, but on belief in superior levels of civilization, culture, and political organization.

Rowlandson's sense of superiority does seem to come from a deeply ingrained sense of cultural privilege. That privilege is strongly bound up in her identity as a woman, meeting all of the demands of her culture's prescriptive definition of femininity, as had been outlined in conduct books throughout the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Henrie Smith's *A Preparative to Marriage*, for example, had explained that "we call the Wife, Huswife, that is house wife, not a street wife . . . to shew that a good wife keeps her house: & therefore Paul biddeth Titus to exhort women that they be chaste, & keeping at home."⁹ Similar ideas are developed in Rowlandson's lifetime in texts like Edward Reyner's *Considerations Concerning Marriage*, wherein the woman's function is defined as "to build a godly family; not onely by the procreation and religious education of childrean (which is a pillar of the house) but by a wise and godly Government and ordering of the house, in which the wife ought to act her part."¹⁰ North American Indian women were widely assumed to fail at these prescriptive standards, as is evidenced by John Essex's conduct manual, *The Young Ladies' Conduct* (1722), which regrets that many "Modish Ladies have no better Opinion of a Country Life, attended with Peace, Plenty, and Happiness, than we generally entertain of the Wild *Indians* in *America*, which is a true Specimen of their ignorance."¹¹ Even in her captive moments most removed from the regulators of these valuations of femininity, Rowlandson affirms both these prescriptions of Puritan femininity and her own identity-defining need to meet them.

Both Rowlandson's story and the preface that Increase Mather appended to its eighteenth-century editions prescriptively narrate the feminine "part" to be acted. The understanding of femininity is normative, the standard against which non-European, non-Christian women must automatically fail, thus circularly retrenching the colonists' assumptions of the social, religious, and gendered hierarchies that are implied equally by discourses of domesticity and civilization. Mather's preface explains that a good woman is God's "precious servant," a passive and subservient being who records her trials only for her own edification, "a pious scope which deserves both commendation and imitation." Mather informs us that the idealized Rowlandson allows her friends to make any part of her identity public only so that "God have his due glory," and even that circumscribed public expression of the female voice requires Mather to "hope . . . none will cast any reflection upon this Gentlewoman, on the score of this publication." Mather's preface establishes an example demanding "imitation," but even in so doing it reminds the reader that a feminine public voice in any other forum demands the casting of explicitly negative reflection.¹² At its close, the preface notes that in the narrative, God will be seen "ruling the most unruly, weakening the most cruel and salvage . . . curbing the lusts of the most filthy"—a standard, if entirely inaccurate, cultural characterization of indigenous men that articulates a clear demand that women be ruled (the opposite of unruly), at risk of sexualized peril.¹³

Rowlandson's own narrative establishes three ostensibly universal determining qualities of true and valuable femininity: sexual purity, maternity, and gender-appropriate production and exchange. The issue of sexual purity may seem

ambiguous to modern readers, as Rowlandson twice describes men offering her gifts if she will come to their wigwams at night (which she does). Six years before Rowlandson's own account was published, however, another report of Rowlandson's captivity offered testimony of Rowlandson's sexual virtue in captivity even as it acknowledged the salacious possibilities. Nathaniel Saltonstall's 1676 *New and Further Narrative of the State of New England* admits that there "was a Report that they had forced Mrs. Rowlinson to marry the one eyed Sachem, but it was soon contradicted; for being a very pious Woman and of great Faith, the Lord wonderfully supported her under this Affliction, so that she appeared and behaved her self amongst them with so much Courage and majestick Gravity, that none durst offer any Violence to her, but on the contrary (in their rude Manner) seemed to show her great Respect."¹⁴ This account, Mather's introduction about divine curbing of filthy lusts, and Rowlandson's own assertion that "not one of them ever offered the least abuse of unchastity to me, in word or action" (*Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, 32) seem to have persuaded Rowlandson's contemporary audience to accept her word. At least there were no *Shamelas* to show for it. Later readers have been somewhat less credulous, however. Neuwirth notes the "subtle (and perhaps unconscious) pleasure she, as narrator, takes in being a sex object—the unwilling recipient of Quinnapin's untoward advances"¹⁵ on the one occasion that Quinnapin drinks alcohol, though all that he offers to Rowlandson is a toast. Faery goes farther as she reads deep affection and a clear attraction between Rowlandson and her master Quinnapin, arguing that her "attachment to Quinnapin becomes intense in the course of the weeks she spends in his charge, and her frankness in expressing her closeness with him is striking."¹⁶

The source of Rowlandson's vehement assertions of the respectful treatment she received is her need to affirm her respectability in the colonial environment through explicit subscription to standards of virtuous femininity. In contrast, her master's polygamous "three squaws" (*Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, 22) are immediately rendered morally suspect by exactly these affirmations, even as Rowlandson tries to press the Indian women into her own Christianized feminine roles. She explains, for example, that her master Quinnapin is married to "King Philip's wife's sister" (*Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, 5) rather than name Weetamoo or acknowledge her status as the squaw-sachem of the Pocasset and Wampanoags. Though reporters like exact contemporary John Dunton could recognize the practicality of a "plurality of wives"¹⁷ in the labor-intensive agrarian and seasonally mobile cultures he describes, practices of polygamy are one of the most consistently cited sources of evidence of the moral failure of the North American Indian peoples. Dunton's practicality aside, though, no reporters seem willing to accept what Pierre Charlevoix termed "a greater disorder still, namely a plurality of husbands,"¹⁸ a practice that some inaccurately ascribed to Rowlandson's mistress, Weetamoo.¹⁹

Rowlandson's energetic affirmation of the asexuality of Puritan femininity is only the first step in conveying prescriptive European ideologies of gender so as to narrate by contrast the failures of indigenous femininity. Her account also emphasizes the presumed unnaturalness of a culture that was in some ways matriarchal and would allow women the sort of political and military leadership that Weetamoo embodied. To illuminate this unnaturalness, Rowlandson explic-

itly articulates her culture's dual prescriptions of maternity and gender-appropriate labor. From the beginning, it is Rowlandson's knowable role as a mother to which she clings while she struggles concurrently to create and negate her identity as captive slave.

Following the battle at Lancaster, Rowlandson is understandably focused almost entirely on her children. Despite being wounded herself, she pulls her dying six-year-old daughter Sarah from the horse on which she is being transported. She carries the child herself until she collapses and then is put on horseback with the child, a humane and merciful gesture that she does not choose to recognize from the "Pagans (now merciless Enemies)" (*Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, 4). When the child dies shortly thereafter, Rowlandson immediately recalibrates her maternity: "God having taken away this dear child, I went to see my daughter *Mary*, who was at this same *Indian Town* at a Wigwam not very far off, though we had little liberty or opportunity to see one another . . . When I came in sight, she would fall a weeping, at which they were provoked, and would not let me come near her, but bade me be gone: which was a heart-cutting word to me. I had one child dead, another in the wilderness I knew not where, the third they would not let me come near to . . . my heart was even overwhelm'd with the thoughts of my condition, that I should have Children, and a Nation which I knew not ruled over them" (*Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, 6). Rowlandson recognizes the distinct cultural "nation" that now cares for her children, and fears that she lacks the spiritual capacity to recontextualize herself outside of the maternal role to which her own "nation" limits her. Rowlandson prays for "some sign and hope of some relief. And indeed quickly the Lord answered" with the appearance of her son, providing confirmation in her maternity that she remains blessed. Throughout the twenty removes, Rowlandson returns to meditation on her children, especially at times when she finds herself struggling to find her place within the new cultural environs.

The murder of Rowlandson's youngest child is a terrible loss, and during the events of the narrative Rowlandson was, of course, unaware that she would soon be permanently reunited with her other two children. Her reporting of her process of survival, however, emphasizes equally her mourning for her children and her sudden ability to establish her own identity independent of that of silent Puritan wife and mother. Interestingly, we hear much less about her children in the passages where Rowlandson is able to make a place for herself in her new environment, as she establishes an identity as seamstress. After the fifth remove, for example, where Rowlandson first is asked to knit for her mistress, Weetamoo, we do not hear any more of the children until the eighth remove, when her son Joseph "unexpectedly" appears. They read the Bible together briefly, and then Rowlandson moves directly into an extended narration of the success of her production and exchange of knitted and sewn goods—one of the very few acceptable products of feminine labor in her own culture. She receives a shilling from King Philip for making a shirt for his boy and exchanges another shirt and a pair of knit stockings with other women for meat and pease. Confirmations of Rowlandson's maternity and details of her specifically feminized production are both repeated throughout the narrative.

It is in the intersection of these two prescriptive values of European femininity in particular that Rowlandson's work becomes intriguing in the way that it constructs the failure of indigenous femininity. Weetamoo, whom Rowlandson describes as her "mistriss," is inattentive and often abusive, but such qualities are elucidated in terms substantially informed by the language of the English mistress-servant relationship. Weetamoo's difference appears to be imagined as a distinction in status, rather than as a fundamentally qualitative deviation. But even with Rowlandson's hit-and-miss recognition of her own status in the community as a servant and as a commodity to be traded, Weetamoo is the Other. Even as the thrice-royal squaw-sachem, Weetamoo is consistently narrated as a failure by which Rowlandson can affirm her own privileged status and identity, even in her entirely disempowered state.

While Rowlandson consistently (if begrudgingly) acknowledges the status of the leader she calls "Philip," bringing him small gifts and noting his authority over other members of the Wampanoag and Narragansett communities, she at no point acknowledges Weetamoo's public rank. She instead describes her only in terms of her failure at Eurocentric domestic femininity. Though Weetamoo's status in the community encompasses both the privilege of a member of a royal family and the power incumbent in her success as a leader of warriors, Rowlandson either cannot or will not recognize the possibility of a woman in such a role. Instead, she initially provides the given names and rank of her "master" and "mistriss" only in a parenthetical note, rhetorically minimizing their status and their power over her, even as she acknowledges that power through the titles of master and mistress—the anglicization of her liminal status in a "nation" that she does not want to know (*Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, 5).

Her second description of Weetamoo does not occur until the twelfth remove, when Weetamoo attends the burial of a papoose in the community. Though Rowlandson would have observed any number of interactions, her account again does not acknowledge Weetamoo until she participates in a ritual that may be categorized as maternal. As they begin the next journey (apparently "homeward"), Weetamoo "gives out" and forces Rowlandson to return to the village they have left. That Rowlandson implies feminized physical weakness as the reason for their return is important here, especially given her own "impatient and almost outrageous" emotional response. In the same remove, Rowlandson's language also reminds us of her presumed privilege even over the woman she terms her mistress: she hopes that her own redemption is not far off "because [her captors'] insolency grew worse and worse" (*Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, 14). The specific accusation of insolence refers to Weetamoo's throwing Rowlandson's Bible out of the wigwam. In an example of the cultural taxonomy that preceded the racialized one in Anglo-American culture, Weetamoo's rejection of Christianity transforms her difference to inferiority in Rowlandson's eyes.²⁰ Even as she acknowledges the slave status of other white female captives, Rowlandson will not see it in herself. Instead she positions herself in the manner determined by her own culture: inferior only to certain men, superior to the non-Christian woman sachem whom she serves circumstantially.²¹ As Laura Arnold and Luise Van Keuren both point out in their work on the Indian sense of humor in colonial narrative, Rowlandson's punished misbehaviors are largely a function of "her desire to posit the Algonqui-

ans as the cultural intruders”²² and of her desire to read Weetamoo’s actions within a Puritan social framework instead of recognizing her own status as servant in a distinct cultural system that demands far fewer gendered divisions of labor and leadership than Rowlandson’s own.

Still, religious difference and racialized physiognomy do collapse into one another in the narrative as Rowlandson watches a group of Indians approach in English dress: “[W]hen they came near, there was a vast difference between the lovely Faces of *Christians*, and the foul looks of those *Heathens*” (39). Once again Englishness, goodness, and Christianity are equated as Rowlandson asserts the inability of the Other to appropriate the European position through the external imitation of cultural cross-dressing or the spiritual imitation of Red Christians. Interestingly, despite the standard differentiation among nations based on religion and culture, Rowlandson specifically rejects the possibility that her position can be appropriated or approximated on the basis of appearance. The lovely faces of Christians are fundamentally different from the “foul looks” of the Other. European scientific discourse might not have established racialized difference on the basis of biophysiological features for another hundred years, but Rowlandson explicitly links the cultural/religious differentiation and the physiological racial differentiation surprisingly early.²³

Weetamoo’s exemplary failure, though, is not limited to grounds of privileged Christianity or physiognomy. She is also inappropriately masculine in Rowlandson’s reportage. She physically attacks Rowlandson over the captive’s unwillingness to surrender a part of her apron to make a flap for the child of King Philip (to whom Rowlandson refers consistently as “Phillip,” again refusing to acknowledge a hierarchy distinct from her own). Rowlandson threatens to tear the coat of Philip’s maid, at which Weetamoo attacks her with a “stick large enough to have killed [her]”—a gesture both masculinized in its energy and effective in its result as Rowlandson immediately hands over the entire apron in a brief acknowledgment of the power entailed in Weetamoo’s difference (*Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, 17). Immediately after this scene, however, Rowlandson tries to force Weetamoo back into a position of feminine failure by invoking maternity, a position by definition indefensible through masculinized aggression. Rowlandson’s very next description is of the sickness and death of Weetamoo’s papoose and her own distance from the mourning ritual in which Weetamoo participates: “On the morrow they buried the Papoos: and afterward, both morning and evening, there came a company to mourn and howl with her: though I confess, I could not much condole with them” (*Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, 18). Breitwieser reads Rowlandson’s depiction of the death of Weetamoo’s child as a performance of cold indifference intended to “impersonate the force that instigates the vanishings, and thus to annul that fact of her vulnerability, to recompose a feeling of control that admits the reality of woe, but not of helplessness . . . [in a way that will enhance] her ability to dissociate herself from also being the recipient of killing.”²⁴ While Breitwieser himself acknowledges that it “may be wishful thinking”²⁵ to find Rowlandson’s unequivocal coldness unconvincing, identifying it as a strategy for seeking emotional and spiritual control seems entirely appropriate.

Rowlandson limits the depiction of this coldness to this and two other important scenes: her stealing of food from an English child and her consumption of

a deer fetus. All of the scenes in which she enacts this emotional distance involve issues of maternity. In contrast, she describes almost warmly her experiences with her male captors, though she saw them as the group's leaders and must have perceived them as the architects of the attack on Lancaster. The recognition of this gap between the men whom Rowlandson assumes to be most guilty and the women against whom she acts out is essential in coming to terms with Rowlandson's retrospective representation of her evolving identity and her representation of the Algonquian culture against which she re-creates that identity.²⁶ The power Weetamoo displays can be understood by Rowlandson only as emblematic of a disreputable appropriation of masculinity, and it is on this transgression of gendered boundaries that Rowlandson tacitly blames Weetamoo's inability to sustain her child. Weetamoo's mourning is negated and pressed beyond gendered failure into human failure in the language of animalized howling, presumed inescapably inferior to a proper Christian burial.

As Weetamoo's slave, Rowlandson could not have avoided witnessing some of Weetamoo's more public roles in her community, but Rowlandson invariably tries to write her mistress into a Europeanized femininity. She recognizes Weetamoo's social status by comparing her to a lady of the "gentry" but concurrently declines to recognize her political and military roles. She describes Weetamoo as a "severe and proud Dame . . . bestowing every day in dressing her self near as much time as any of the Gentry of the land: powdering her hair, and painting her face, going with her Neck-laces, with Jewels in her ears, and bracelets upon her hands" (*Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, 22). Numerous contemporary descriptions note that male and female dress and decoration differed little in the practice of many indigenous cultures.²⁷ Weetamoo's bodily display of wealth is a demonstration of her political status, one ungendered in Algonquian culture. In Rowlandson's reporting, however, that literal embodiment of wealth and power is reinscribed as merely a feminized ritual of vain toilette. Similarly, Rowlandson's summary that "[Weetamoo's] work was to make girdles of wampum and beads" (*Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, 22) reduces this work to a feminized arts and crafts project by failing to recognize its significance as a manipulation of the wealth and status that wampum represented in Wampanoag and Narragansett communities. It seems quite clear that Rowlandson consistently responds to her own inability to understand the significance of Weetamoo's actions by trivializing them as the acts of a vain coquette of the sort obviously unacceptable to the implied Puritan readership. Rebecca Blevins Faery, however, attempts to establish a reading of these scenes that is more sympathetic to Rowlandson, even as she acknowledges their obvious dismissive qualities. She argues that "Rowlandson's comparing Weetamoo with a 'Dame' of the English 'Gentry' could perhaps be read as ridiculing Weetamoo's toilet and self-adornment as pretentious; her description is, however, the result of careful and attentive observation that could as easily be motivated by her curiosity about a Native world that is beginning to open itself up to her understanding. I find in the passage a hint of admiration and even envy on the part of the captive and bedraggled Englishwoman toward the regal dress and demeanor of the Indian 'queen.'"²⁸ It seems more likely that a Puritan woman married to a Puritan preacher and closely associated with the great Puritan spokesman Increase Mather implies derogation in locating Weetamoo in the privileged and implicitly frivolous realm of English "gentry." In both groups Row-

landson sees a sinful pride in the vanity of face painting (termed “that sinful art of painting their Faces” by fellow Puritan Edward Johnson).²⁹ Instead, the passage seems organized to perform the same double duty seen in other accounts of Indian women: to ridicule the ignorance of Native American women by describing them as parodies of the aristocratic European women of fashion who were also regarded by Puritans as ridiculous and immoral.³⁰ Thus the Puritan standard of prescriptive femininity is privileged over both frivolous European fashion and ignorant American savagery to emerge the one true way: woman as “servant of God” who acts only her private, domestic part. Such depictions are central in establishing concurrently what has been termed “white women’s double positioning, at once inside and outside of the dominant culture”³¹ and what emerges as the double liminality of the Indian woman, rendered both marginal and monstrous by the combination of the presumed weakness of her gender and the presumed incivility of her race.

The same minimization occurs in the description of the dance Rowlandson witnesses in the final remove. She ignores the obvious evidence of status in the fact that her master and mistress lead the dance, and again explicitly feminizes dress that is not gendered by the dancers: “She had a Kersey Coat, and was covered with girdles of Wampum from the Loins and upward. Her Arms from her Elbows to her Hands were covered with Bracelets; there were handfals of Necklaces about her Neck, and several sorts of Jewels in her Ears. She had fine red Stockins, and white Shoos, her Hair powdered and Face painted Red, that was alwayes before Black . . . They held on, till it was almost night, throwing out Wampum to the standers by” (*Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, 26). The dress is not substantively different from that of the male dancers as Rowlandson describes them, but it is gendered on the same Eurocentric grounds on which all of Weetamoo’s actions are devalued. The only element of the account that might well be gendered is not, likely at least in part because to do so would be to acknowledge Weetamoo’s status and privilege. Daniel Gookin’s almost exactly contemporary descriptions of the dress and dance traditions of Narragansett and Wampanoag cultures note that “they delight much in their dancings and revellings; at which time he that danceth (for they dances singly, the men, and not the women, the rest singing, which is their chief musick) will give away in his frolick, all that ever he hath, gradually, some to one, and some to another, according to his fancy and affection.”³² According to Gookin’s observations from a similarly external position, the notable element of Rowlandson’s account with regard to gender is not Weetamoo’s makeup or dress, but that as a woman she dances at all. Her ungendered position of power apparently allows her to perform ceremonial roles otherwise limited to men. Further, as Arnold has also noted, Weetamoo’s dress is an obvious display of wealth and power, and the distribution of wampum is an important gesture of Wampanoag and Narragansett conventions of reciprocity, in which the act of giving confirms status and power, not submission or worship, as gift-giving was so often misperceived in early contact.³³

Rowlandson’s multiple misinterpretations or misrepresentations of Weetamoo’s manipulation and distribution of great wealth can be further illuminated by David Murray’s history of interracial exchange in North America. First, he documents clearly that both men and women would string wampum. Especially

important in regard to the dance described here, Murray then goes on to note that in the ritual gifting typical of the Indians of what became New England, giving “a gift that cannot be equalled or returned [is] the ultimate act of sovereign power.”³⁴ Interestingly, Rowlandson does seem to understand the cultural importance of gifts in the context of her relationship with Quinnapin, as when she describes herself as “not a little glad that I had any thing that they would accept of, and be pleased with” (*Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, 13), when her master accepts her gift of a knife. But to recognize such power in a woman seems to threaten too much her gendered and racialized Puritan frames of reference: she is unable to construct difference as privilege for anyone other than herself.

Throughout her narrative, Rowlandson appears driven by selective recognition significant in terms of the ways in which she maintains her own sense of privilege, regardless of her actual position. She accepts payment of English hats and aprons in exchange for her sewing, for example, but expresses shock at the pile of bloodied clothing that she sees in one wigwam. She has watched bodies stripped of their clothing in the attack on Lancaster and so must be perfectly aware of the source of many of the English goods for which she trades. But she chooses to embrace her selective memory when it helps her obtain goods that remark her femininity either in the act of exchange for her specifically feminized skills or in the specifically feminized goods she receives. In the same way, she selectively understands the established hierarchies and cultural difference of her captors only when they allow her to maintain the intellectual and psychological distance from which she self-inscribes status. The many squaws who provide her with food and comfort are drawn as feminine (especially the maternal older partner of her master), but those who do not—particularly Weetamoo, who treats her as a servant—are depicted as cruel, frivolous, and proud, failed mothers and masculinized attackers.

Ultimately, Rowlandson’s sense of Weetamoo’s failure at femininity comes from her own inability to place her mistress in the distinct discourses of gender that determine Weetamoo’s self-identity. This in turn is the result of Rowlandson’s inability to reconcile herself to the ungended hierarchies, dress, and rituals that she observes in the royal couples of the Wampanoags and Narragansetts. If, as the Puritans believed, the existing European social order was God’s will, then the alternate Algonquian social order must be an abomination, providing further confirmation that Christianity was a valid test of deserved empowerment. The non-Christian indigenous culture was thus determined invalid by its ungended order, a belief conveyed clearly in Rowlandson’s physiological racialization, a confirmation of the “savagery” of the “tyrannical heathen” that she terms her captors. This invalidity is asserted particularly at the beginning and end of her captivity, the two points at which she is most able to compare them to her own dominant culture.³⁵

Rowlandson’s cultured selective recognition is made especially clear in the closing passages, where she compares her experience in captivity to her life immediately after her return to New England society: “I was not before so much hem’d in with the merciless and cruel *Heathen*, but now as much with pitiful, tender-hearted, and compassionate *Christians*. In that poor, and distressed, and beggarly condition, I was received in, I was kindly entertained in several houses.

So much love I received from several, (some of whom I knew, and others I knew not) that I am not capable to declare it. But the Lord knows them all by name: the Lord reward them seven fold into their bosoms of his spirituals for their temporals" (*Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, 30). Rowlandson's standard has changed again. In captivity, those who were kind to her (in what she perceived as acknowledgment of her status) were nearly acceptable women, and those who were not were trivialized and despised for their failure. Upon her release, she describes a situation nearly identical to that she experienced while in captivity, right down to her "poor, and distressed, and beggarly condition," but the responses are characterized as acts of specifically Christian charity and thus are valued differently. With such an obvious parallel structure and parallel language in this closing segment, one must wonder whether Rowlandson might herself have been aware of the similar humanity of her treatment in both contexts, but regardless, as a proper Puritan woman, she characterizes the difference as one of God's removing her from "that horrible pit, and [setting her] in the midst of tender-hearted and compassionate Christians" (*Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, 32).

Laura Arnold rightly argues that "[a]s a squaw-sachem, Weetamoo undermines [the] reassuring image of a submissive Algonquian population. Because Weetamoo challenges the hierarchal relations between men and women, she also challenges the hierarchy between the British and Algonquians."³⁶ I am not convinced that Rowlandson herself knew the full extent of Weetamoo's status until after her captivity, or that she necessarily made the larger ideological connections outlined here in terms of the *effect* of the narrative, but certainly Increase Mather did, and this adds one last layer of implication to Rowlandson's construction of indigenous femininity as failure. In approving Rowlandson's publication of her tale with his guiding preface, Mather gives to a selected woman an acceptable public voice that allows him to ventriloquize his own political agenda against the Indians and in favor of passive feminine purity. He confirms for both colonial women and British readers back home the validity and essential nature of the status quo—of Christianity's limiting of the feminine role to asexuality, maternity, and gendered production and exchange—using the most powerful Indian woman in New England as a cipher for all of the dangers of the cross-contamination of gendered and racial spheres. Femininity is narrated to be so entirely natural here that even heathen squaws recognize their gendered place. Weetamoo's powerful, threatening, and even violent acts in the public realm render her a failure in Rowlandson's imperialist gaze and, in Mather's view, a determinative example of the "atheistical, proud, wild, cruel, barbarous, brutish, (in one word) diabolical creatures . . . the worst of heathen"—and a woman whom all readers must "cast . . . reflection upon" if they are to glean the full message of this mass-marketed and widely consumed prescriptive text.

NOTES

1. While the preface is not signed by Mather, it is generally attributed to him. See Charles Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1982), 259, and David Minter, "By Dens of Lions: Notes on Stylization in Early Puritan Captivity Narratives," *American Literature* 45, no. 2 (1973): 336–7.

2. For detailed explanations and chronologies of transfers of power among several of the New England tribes, see Howard Chapin, *Sachems of the Narragansetts* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1931).

3. Increase Mather, *A Brief History of the War with the Indians in New England* (London: Richard Chiswell, 1676), 46.

4. Mitchell Breitwieser, *American Puritanism and the Defense of Mourning: Religion, Grief, and Ethnology in Mary White Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Theresa Toulouse, "'My Own Credit': Strategies of (E)valuation in Mary Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative," *American Literature* 64, no. 4 (1992): 655–76; Steven Neuwirth, "Her Master's Voice: Gender, Speech, and Gendered Speech in the Narrative of the Captivity of Mary White Rowlandson," in *Sex and Sexuality in Early America*, ed. Merrill D. Smith (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1998), 55–86; Tara Fitzpatrick, "The Figure of Captivity: The Cultural Work of the Puritan Captivity Narrative," *American Literary History* 3, no. 1 (1991): 1–26; Ralph Bauer, "Creole Identities in Colonial Space: The Narratives of Mary White Rowlandson and Francisco Nuñez de Pineda y Bascunan," *American Literature* 69, no. 4 (1997): 665–95; Rebecca Blevins Faery, *Cartographies of Desire: Captivity, Race, and Sex in the Shaping of an American Nation* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

5. Other, earlier studies progressing toward the same conclusion include Francois Bernier's 1684 study in *Journal des scavans*, which distinguished among four species or races of men ("espèces ou races d'hommes") (Europeans, including Persians and North Africans; black Africans; Chinese; and Lapps). Nicholas Hudson notes that Bernier dithered about whether to label Americans as a different group from Europeans and dwelled largely on the varying beauty of women in different regions. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz later proposed a similar division, "observing that the human species 'has been altered by the different climates, as we see beasts and plants change their nature, improve or degenerate.'" See Hudson, "From 'Nation' to 'Race': The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29, no. 3 (1996): 252.

6. Roxann Wheeler, "The Complexion of Desire: Racial Ideology and Mid-Eighteenth-Century British Novels," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, no. 3 (1999): 312, 325.

7. Thomas Morton, *The New English Canaan* (London, 1637), reprinted in *Tracts and Other Papers, Relating Principally to the Origin, Settlement, and Progress of the Colonies in North America*, ed. Peter Force (Washington: Peter Force, 1836), 324.

8. Wheeler, "Complexion of Desire," 315. See also Alden T. Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995). Vaughan's observations help clarify the relationship between skin color, Christianity, and status in colonial North America. He argues that Africans' blackness—"a color fraught with pejorative implications"—was perceived very differently from what was widely termed "tawny" in American Indians; thus black Africans were widely believed "fundamentally unassimilable, even if they adopted English ways and beliefs . . . By contrast, Anglo-Americans believed that American Indians were inherently like themselves and that they were approximately as light-skinned as Europeans; they could—indeed would—be assimilated into colonial society as soon as they succumbed to English social norms and Christian theology. The basic beliefs about Africans held fast throughout the colonial period and beyond. The assumptions about Native Americans underwent a slow but drastic change in the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth as Anglo-Americans shifted their perception of Indian character and, concomitantly, of Indian color from innately white to innately dark and eventually to red" (5).

9. Henrie Smith, *A Preparative to Marriage* (London: I. Charlewood, 1591), 79.

10. Edward Reyner, *Considerations Concerning Marriage* (London: J. Twyn, 1657), 7. As Theresa Toulouse points out, such regulations have even greater implications in Puritan social discourse as the language of martyrdom intersects with constructions of gender: "The self-sacrifice and affliction of the martyr thus become signs that could indicate not only 'true' sainthood but also 'true' womanliness . . . The agent of a martyr's affliction and redemption is the body, not the body as aggressive and actively competitive but as weak, passive, and enduring—all characteristics theologically recognized as Christian and culturally recognized as womanly" (Toulouse, "'My Own Credit,'" 659).

11. John Essex, *The Young Ladies' Conduct* (London: John Brotherton, 1722), xxv.

12. Mary Rowlandson, *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (London: Joseph Poole, 1682), 32. In subsequent references in the text, this work will be abbreviated as *Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*. For an opposing sense of the gendered implications of Rowlandson's narrative, see Steven Neuwirth's argument that Rowlandson speaks "in her own voice against (not in support of) a male-constructed vision of womanhood" as a "spokesperson for oppressed women everywhere" (Neuwirth, "Her Master's Voice," 55, 58). While we are in agreement that Rowlandson's identity is rooted in male-prescribed femininity and that a masculine voice echoes through that of the narrator, we disagree on the implication. To see the obedient, emphatically Puritan Rowlandson as a protofeminist icon strikes me as deeply problematic even before considering Mather's acts of prescriptive ventriloquism. I also find the critiques of men's behavior less emblematic of a subversion of the gendered status quo than an affirmation of it. Rowlandson focuses consistently on failures of chivalrous behaviors of protection and rescue, grounding her discussion firmly in traditional paradigms of passive femininity and active masculinity.

13. Without specific reference to this passage, Rebecca Blevins Faery clarifies it with the parallels in the status of women and North American Indians in colonial New England: "Englishwomen and Indians in fact stood in a very similar relation to the patriarchal male Puritan: both were thought of as not fully adult; both were defined, in their benign aspects, by their presumed dependence on the Puritan 'father' figure; both were thought to have a more intimate connection with the forces of 'nature' (rather than 'culture')—Indians because of their supposedly 'uncivilized' or 'precivilized' way of life, women because of their cyclic rhythms, reproductive function, and bodily experiences of childbirth, lactation, and nurturance—and thus to be more inclined to licentiousness and other kinds of unruliness" (Faery, *Cartographies of Desire*, 32).

14. Nathaniel Saltonstall, *A New and Further Narrative of the State of New England* (London, 1676), reprinted in *Narratives of the Indian Wars 1675–1699*, ed. Charles H. Lincoln (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 83.

15. Neuwirth, "Her Master's Voice," 70.

16. Faery, *Cartographies of Desire*, 70.

17. John Dunton, *John Dunton's Letters Written from New England*, (1705; reprint edited by W. H. Whitmore, Boston: The Prince Society, 1867), 271.

18. Pierre François Xavier Charlevoix, *Journal of a Voyage to North America*, ed. Louise Phelps Kellogg (Chicago: Caxton Club, 1923), 2:46. The journey described takes place from spring 1721 to December 1722; the record was published in French in 1744 and translated into English in 1761. See also Daniel Denton, *A Brief Description of New York: Formerly Called New-Netherlands* (London: John Hancock and William Bradley, 1670).

19. As nearly every account of the Indians of New England makes clear, the English had difficulty coming to terms with the relative ease with which an unhappy or unsuccessful coupling could be dissolved. After Weetamoo's first husband, Wamsutta (Alexander, brother to Metacom/King Philip) had died (possibly having been poisoned by colonists for inconsistent support after his father's death), she married Quequequamanchet, from whom she later separated, possibly because of her anger at his cooperation with the colonists. Quinnapin was her third husband serially, not concurrently.

20. The *Oxford English Dictionary* confirms with examples from 1650, 1668, and 1683 that the usage of "insolency" had shifted from mere rudeness to "offensive contemptuousness of action or speech due to presumption."

21. Theresa Toulouse reaches a similar conclusion in her argument that Rowlandson does recognize some elements of hierarchy in the Indian culture, though they are generally limited to those that "at least in her eyes bear some similarity to her own." She notes that "for Rowlandson herself, in this text, Indian women derive their worth from that of their husbands, their 'masters'" (Toulouse, "'My Own Credit,'" 657–8).

22. Laura Arnold, "'Now . . . Didn't Our People Laugh?' Female Misbehavior and Algonquian Culture in Mary Rowlandson's *Captivity and Restauration*," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 21, no. 4 (1997): 8; Luise Van Keuren, "The American Indian as Humorist in Colonial Literature," in *A Mixed Race*, ed. Frank Shuffleton (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993).

23. Ralph Bauer reads historicized reconstructions of the relationship between race and religion differently. He argues that Rowlandson "deemphasizes Christianity as a unifying force, emphasizing

instead racial difference in exposing the 'true' nature of the 'Praying Indians' . . . At a time when Indians were becoming Christians ('Red Puritans') and whites were falling into creolean 'declension' ('White Indians'), racial difference remained the only bastion keeping New Englanders separate from 'Americans'" (Bauer, "Creole Identities in Colonial Space," 680).

24. Breitwieser, *American Puritanism*, 115.

25. Breitwieser, *American Puritanism*, 115.

26. Julia Stern's illuminating review essay of Breitwieser's work raises parallel questions of Rowlandson's identity particularly in terms of Puritan typology: "If Puritanism according to Breitwieser almost always functions according to 'type,' Rowlandson refuses to resolve herself into any sort of stable figure: neither an emblem of Puritan piety, nor a sign for heretical dissent, her mourning keeps her spiritual identity at a distance from the type and ever on the move." See Stern, "To Represent Afflicted Time: Mourning as Historiography," *American Literary History* 5 (1993): 382.

27. See, for example, Daniel Gookin, *Historical Collections of the Indians in New England* (1674; reprint edited by Jeffrey H. Fiske, Towtaid, Mass., 1970). Gookin reports on dress and dance traditions, with specific reference to the five "principal nations" of New England, including the "Naragansitts" and "Pawkunnawkutts" (later known as the Wampanoags). He notes that both men and women "used to oil their skins and hair with bear's grease heretofore, but now with swine's fat, and then paint their faces with vermilion, or other red, and powder their heads. Also they use black and white paints; and make one part of their face one colour; and another, of another, very deformedly" (19). Appointed Superintendent of the Indians of Massachusetts from 1656 until his death in 1687, Gookin is one of the few reporters to distinguish in detail among different indigenous cultures. See also Robert Beverley, *The History of Virginia, in Four Parts* (London: R. Parker, 1705).

28. Faery, *Cartographies of Desire*, 69.

29. Edward Johnson, *Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence* (London, 1654), quoted in James Axtell, *The Europeans and the Indians: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1981), 153.

30. See, for example, Chrestien Le Clercq, *A New Relation of Gaspesia with the Customs and Religion of the Gaspesian Indians*, tr. and ed. William F. Ganong (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1910). Published in 1691, Le Clercq's account suggests a strangeness in the Micmac tradition of breastfeeding until the child is four or five years old but concurrently notes that "by this conduct they reproach the lack of feeling of those mothers who abandon these little innocents to the care of nurses, from whom very often they suck corruption with the milk" (91). Later, the surprisingly well documented notes of "Uxorious" in *Hymen: An Accurate Description of the Ceremonies used in Marriage by every Nation in the Known World* (London, 1760) cite Lahontan's 1703 accounts of cultural barriers to the marriage of women who are past childbearing and comment, "I answer they should contrive expedients to conceal their age from the world; but, if their sincerity will not suffer them to impose upon the other sex, it must be own'd they greatly surpass our European ladies in that virtue" (83).

31. See Brigitte Georgi-Findlay's discussion of the work of Annette Kolodny in *The Frontiers of Women's Writing: Women's Narratives and the Rhetoric of Western Expansion* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1996), 11.

32. Gookin, *Historical Collections*, 19.

33. Arnold, "'Now . . . Didn't Our People Laugh?'" 15.

34. David Murray, *Indian Giving: Economies of Power in Indian-White Exchanges* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 69.

35. Tara Fitzpatrick reads Rowlandson's narrative as more sympathetic and comprehending of Algonquian culture than I do, but we are in agreement about the central significance of Rowlandson's struggle to incorporate two divergent cultural systems: "Even while she attributes the Indians' mercies to God's intercession, and while the Indians never cease to symbolize the savage 'other' and to act as agents of supernatural powers, whether demonic or divine, her narrative represents an intersection in the contest of cultures" (Fitzpatrick, "The Figure of Captivity," 12).

36. Arnold, "'Now . . . Didn't Our People Laugh?'" 14.